

ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY  
INTERVIEW WITH  
BARRETT SHELTON, SR.

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY







7645-9250

OHT 8/19/92



**MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARIES**

MVC  
TC  
425  
T2  
S48x  
1970

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS LIBRARIES




3 2109 00699 7077









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2012 with funding from  
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://archive.org/details/oralhistoryofte00shel>







ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY  
INTERVIEW WITH BARRETT SHELTON, SR.

JUNE 18, 1970

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY







MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

I hereby release all right, title, or interest in and to all of my tape-recorded memoirs to the Mississippi Valley Archives of the John Willard Brister Library of Memphis State University and declare that they may be used without any restriction whatsoever and may be copyrighted and published by the said Archives, which also may assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

PLACE Decatur, Ala.

DATE June 17, 1970

Barrett C. Shelton  
(Interviewee) BARRETT C. Shelton

Charles W. Campbell  
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives  
of the John Willard Brister Library  
of Memphis State University)







THIS IS MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
PROJECT IN THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY.  
THIS IS JUNE 18, 1970. THE PLACE IS DECATUR, ALABAMA. AND  
THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. BARRETT SHELTON, SR., EDITOR OF THE  
DECATUR DAILY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD,  
DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH  
OFFICE.

DR. CRAWFORD: I suggest, Mr. Shelton, we start by sum-  
ming up some introductory material about you: Where  
you were born; Where you lived; Your education and  
your experience until the '30's started.

MR. SHELTON: All right. Let's see then. I am the son  
of Mr. and Mrs. William Randolph Shelton. I was born  
at Columbia, Tennessee, in 1902. My father and mother  
founded this newspaper, The Decatur Daily, and the  
first issue was February 26, 1912. I was a newspaper  
carrier at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: At the age of ten.

MR. SHELTON: Something like that. Anyway, my life has  
been spent here in Decatur. I was a graduate of the  
local high school. I went to Washington and Lee Uni-







MR. SHELTON:           versity in 1920. Three years later I had to  
(Cont'd.)  
give up college and come back and run this newspaper  
owing to the ill health and subsequent death of my father  
in 1924. And I have been engaged in the publication of  
this newspaper since that time.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What was the state of the city and of the  
surrounding region at the time you started editing the  
newspaper in the '20's? What were conditions like here  
at the time?

MR. SHELTON:           At that time Decatur was two struggling little  
towns: one, Decatur; the other, New Decatur, and from  
time to time the name of New Decatur was changed to Albany;  
finally the two towns were consolidated in 1927. This  
was done by legislative act. This was something that the  
newspaper had advocated from the first day of its publi-  
cation.

                          We were at that time a one industry town.  
The Louisville and Nashville Railroad Shops were here.  
Along about 1930 there was a nation-wide railroad strike.  
We were very hard hit by that strike. And the result of  
it was that this railroad shop was closed. So you find  
us going into the depression years with cotton at five  
cents a pound, practically no industry at all, and that







MR. SHELTON:           was the way the '30's started. There were,  
(Cont'd.)  
when the depression really got along, eight banks, eight  
banking institutions in this county, Morgan County, Ala-  
bama, and seven of them closed.

I believe that it was in 1933 when the Tennes-  
see Valley Authority was created by act of the Congress  
through the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Senator  
Lister Hill, who was then a member of the House of Repre-  
sentatives from Alabama, and Senator George Norris of  
Nebraska. This is how the Tennessee Valley Authority  
had its beginning, with its purpose outlined in the act  
which was adopted by the Congress.

President Roosevelt, if I can remember my  
dates approximately correctly, was inaugurated in 1933.  
And he came here to Decatur, and he told us that he was  
going to put the Tennessee Valley back on the map of  
the United States.

DR. CRAWFORD:        I wondered how early he had planned that.  
Was this after his election or the inauguration?

MR. SHELTON:        This was after the election but before his  
inauguration.







DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. That would have been about '32.

MR. SHELTON: I think so. I think so. He probably went into the presidency in March '33. . . January of '33. Well, the act of creating the Tennessee Valley Authority came along pretty early in 1933 if my history is in my mind correctly.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. May 17th I believe.

MR. SHELTON: 1933. So he had become president in January of that year.

DR. CRAWFORD: And as early as the time he was down here he was thinking of TVA?

MR. SHELTON: That's what he told. He said, "This is the first time I have seen acres of people, acres of people." You know where they were? Right outside my window down here. There was a railroad station down here. And there were just as he said acres of people. Nobody knew where to turn. Nobody knew what to do. We were completely in an economic situation where no man knew where in the world to turn; didn't know where his next meal was coming from. That was the situation that the President of the United States or the President-to-be







MR. SHELTON: of the United States walked into at Decatur,  
(Cont'd.)  
Alabama.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know what he really had in mind about  
TVA? Do you know if he knew any details of it at that  
time?

MR. SHELTON: No, I don't. No, I don't because all this  
was news to us. We knew nothing about it. We didn't  
know anything about it. All through the years, Dr.  
Crawford, if you went back to the '20's or if you went  
back even before the first world war, immediately after  
the first world war, history will show you of the inter-  
est in the development of the Muscle Shoals area. And  
for various reasons it never took place.

My father had a letter from Henry Ford who  
at one time was interested in, I think made a bid as  
far as I recall now, made a bid for Wilson Dam.

DR. CRAWFORD: And for the chemical plant there, I think.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, so it was never accepted. And I think  
it was a good thing that it wasn't. Now, of course, then  
we thought well anything to get us out—to help us help  
ourselves get out of this situation that we were in was







MR. SHELTON:               certainly welcome. So we were in dire finan-  
(Cont'd.)  
                              cial straits here in this area. This was not uncommon  
                              in the United States at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD:             I remember in one of his speeches he spoke of  
                              one part of the nation "ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed."  
                              Does that seem to describe the valley area as you knew  
                              it at the time?

MR. SHELTON:             Yes, it did. It did. Of course, this wasn't  
                              the only area he was talking about. If you go back  
                              again into the political history at one time wasn't there  
                              a gentleman they called Uncle Joe Robinson in Arkansas?

DR. CRAWFORD:             Yes, sir.

MR. SHELTON:             They were talking about developing the Arkan-  
                              sas River in the same way that later we developed the  
                              Tennessee River?

DR. CRAWFORD:             Yes, sir.

MR. SHELTON:             Well, anyhow, I've forgotten what the poli-  
                              tical trade was but the Tennessee River, and this, of  
                              course, is hearsay with me but the Tennessee River was  
                              the river that was adopted by the Administration, by







MR. SHELTON:           the Democratic Administration, instead of  
(Cont'd.)  
                  the Arkansas River.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Do you know why this river was selected?

MR. SHELTON:           No, sir, I do not other than perhaps its  
                  characteristics. For instance, Dr. Crawford, I've often  
                  wondered why in the world that the Mississippi River  
                  has never been controlled. Now the Tennessee from an  
                  engineering standpoint could be controlled. The  
                  Mississippi, so I'm told, could never be controlled because  
                  of its shifting river bed or shore lines. I've never  
                  been quite convinced of that because I think man can  
                  do most anything that he sets out to do if he's got  
                  enough brains and enough money to do it with.

DR. CRAWFORD:           TVA illustrated that, I suppose. Did people  
                  in Decatur generally believe that President Roosevelt  
                  was really going to do something when he made the  
                  speech here? Were they looking forward to it after  
                  that?

MR. SHELTON:           I would doubt that they had any idea of  
                  what he was talking about. I don't think they had any  
                  conception at all of a regional development. I'm sure  
                  they didn't.







DR. CRAWFORD:           When the act was passed in May of 1933 what did you think of it?

MR. SHELTON:            I didn't know anything about it. Let me show you a little something here in answer to your question. In answer to your question—"What did I think about the act or what did I know about the act?" I was privileged to talk to the United Nations on September the 5th, 1949, to tell the Decatur story. And in answer to your question, I think it is answered right here when I said, "In the beginning I opposed TVA. I didn't know what had been intended. I knew I wanted no government control of my life nor over the lives of my people. Throughout much of our lives the progressive citizens of Decatur had tried to better conditions and it appeared that no matter in what direction they turned the results were far from producing lasting good." Now that's in answer to what you were asking me—"What did I know about it." I didn't know anything about it.

DR. CRAWFORD:           When and how did you start learning more about TVA?

MR. SHELTON:            Well, again the question is answered right here. Let me just quote a few paragraphs from this story so you can get the background to these questions







MR. SHELTON:           that you are asking. "Now this year is 1933.  
(Cont'd.)

The one major industry we had which had kept two thousand men at work closed. This railroad shop gave way to the truck, the bus, and economic conditions. Decatur lost this industry completely. Another industry which in earlier years we had brought from New England with considerable subsidy in money went bankrupt. A third industry, manufacturer of full fashioned hosiery, went to the wall from poor management and bad times. Seven of eight banks in our county closed. Our farm situation: we had only one crop in the Decatur area—cotton—and cotton was five cents a pound. Lands were selling for taxes. The people were ill-housed, ill-clothed, and out of hope. So you can see that we were not interested in saving a dollar or so on our power bill. That would solve little or nothing. We needed jobs and opportunities for our people."

Now here's where we begin with the Tennessee Valley Authority. Right here. "Into this dismal, perplexed economic setting one late mid-winter afternoon came David Lilienthal, then a member of the board of directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Four of our citizens who had long been hopeful of improving conditions generally met him in conference. We were almost frankly hostile, for he represented to us another way of







MR. SHELTON:           thought and another way of life. And our conversation might be summarized in this fashion: 'All right, you're here. You were not invited, but you're here. You are in command. Now what are you going to do?' Dave leaned his chair back against the wall and a twinkle of a smile came into his eyes and he said gently and firmly, 'I'm not going to do anything. You're going to do it.'"

Now this is the story. This is our starting point with the Tennessee Valley Authority. Now he went on to tell us something we never knew before. He went on to say that TVA would provide the tools of opportunity: flood control, malaria control, navigation on the river, low cost power, test demonstration farming to show how our soil could be returned to fertility—a fertility lost through land erosion, another wayward child of a one crop system. He told us the river would no longer defeat man but would become the servant of man. 'What you do with these tools,' he said, 'is up to you.'"

Now that's where we began.

DR. CRAWFORD:           That was the TVA approach wasn't it.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes. That's how we began.







DR. CRAWFORD:           How did the people in Decatur respond to that challenge?

MR. SHELTON:           Well, we went to work. We went to work. You say, "Well, what in the hell did you do?" We had Dr. Harcourt Morgan come down here. Well, we set about the formation of the Decatur Chamber of Commerce. We finally got together three thousand dollars. Our first manager made one hundred dollars a month. This was how we began. We began right at the source, right at the roots of the community. And we have certainly come a very long way since that day, since that time. What are we talking about—thirty-five years?, thirty-seven years? Something of the sort like that.

DR. CRAWFORD:           About thirty-seven.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD:           When did you first start noticing results? When did things begin to improve? What was the agricultural assistance? Was it the inexpensive power?

MR. SHELTON:           Well, really we are talking here about the year 1933. And we've engaged, I would say, in building a community foundation up until the outbreak of the







MR. SHELTON: Second World War which was in 1941, you  
(Cont'd.) remember. And then at the close of that war, we really took off industrially. And from the standpoint of education Decatur has, I expect, the best school system in the state.

Now, this comes from people: how they think; what they want for their community. Otherwise you don't get their resources. You don't get the money to do these things with. You can't . . . Our teachers are not paid on the level of many of the communities in Alabama or Tennessee. They are paid well above these levels because our people believe that education is the building of a first class community, not necessarily a big city, but a first class community.

DR. CRAWFORD: They've been influenced in believing that a little by the newspaper, haven't they?

MR. SHELTON: Yes, they have. Yes, they have. But we saw this a long, long time ago. All of our contacts with the people of the Tennessee Valley Authority have been constructive, inspirational. TVA today is well ahead of our nation as a whole in its thinking, in its planning, and in the execution of its planning. I'm getting into environmental living and this question of water and air pollution







MR. SHELTON:           and this sort of thing which is so popular  
(Cont'd.)  
          today as you know. But I am saying that TVA is so far  
          ahead of the rest of the country, the rest of our nation,  
          in this respect that all of this forward thinking that's  
          been going on in this valley ever since the creation of  
          the Tennessee Valley Authority, has such an impact on how  
          the several million people of this Tennessee Valley think.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Do you believe that's been an influence too.  
  
          Now I have noticed that Decatur is different from most  
          of the areas in Alabama and, for that matter, in surround-  
          ing states, too. You have a much more forward looking  
          city in planning, in education, and in industrialization.  
          Did you get any of this way of thinking from TVA?

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, we did. Heaven sakes, Dr. Crawford, if  
          you ever gave birth to a planning board in years long  
          before planning was ever heard of you can realize that  
          you would run up against some characters who would ques-  
          tion a great deal of what you were doing and what you  
          were trying to do. Again this same thing is of not know-  
          ing, not being convinced you were going in the right  
          direction. I can't tell you what year we started here  
          in Decatur the planning of this city. I don't recall  
          what year but we've been planning a long time. And many  
          of these efforts are just now coming into fruition.







DR. CRAWFORD:           You started early.

MR. SHELTON:            Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Well, what did you think of the quality of TVA leadership? You've known people at the policy-making level and managerial level. What did they bring into the valley that was new in the way of thinking or planning?

MR. SHELTON:            Well, I think it's something like I told you a while ago. Dave Lilienthal said to us, "Now here're the tools. What you do with them is your business. You use them or don't use them as you see fit." But throughout the years I have been engaged with the Tennessee Valley Authority in a number of experimental programs and ideas. This thing of manpower training, for instance. The finest resource we have is our people.

DR. CRAWFORD:           But you needed some training, didn't you?

MR. SHELTON:            But they need training. Sure they do. And so far this thinking that is available to us as community leaders, we have never hesitated to go to the Tennessee Valley Authority and to tell them what we were thinking about this particular project or that or whatever it was and to sit down and have them counsel with us. Now they







MR. SHELTON:            have never told us what to do. They've never  
(Cont'd.)  
given us any directives of any kind. But they have given  
us the benefit of their thinking.

Right now we are going to bring together all  
the bankers in the north Alabama area—this is fifteen  
counties—for one purpose: to get them to sit down and  
listen to a study which has been completed by the Agri-  
culture Division of the Tennessee Valley Authority, on  
the potential of agriculture in these fifteen counties of  
north Alabama.

Now I have just recently put this study in  
the hands of our three bank presidents here in Decatur.  
They will be working with us. This is our community  
leadership working with the leadership in the Tennessee  
Valley Authority in their agricultural division. I be-  
lieve this, Dr. Crawford, that if the people can be  
brought to see what you're talking about and if your  
story is a reasonable story then the people will go with  
you. And if you can't convince them then you better  
drop it right there. Now this is something we have ahead  
of us probably within the next two months—of bringing  
all these bankers together and having them see. You know,  
Alabama has talked a long time about having a billion  
dollars a year income from agriculture. Now we're







MR. SHELTON:            talking about 67 counties when we say that.  
(Cont'd.)

But listen. Right here in these fifteen counties we can have an income of more than one billion dollars from agriculture alone. Now, what are we talking about? We're talking about management, farm management, we're talking about farm credit. Where is this thinking coming from? The agricultural division of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Well, who's going to implement it? We are—on the community level. This is how we have worked with the Tennessee Valley Authority all through the years.

DR. CRAWFORD:        Do you think that was one of their important contributions—this securing community support before going ahead with anything?

MR. SHELTON:        Without any question. Without any question. If the people don't understand it, they are going to be against it because they don't know any better. But if they know then any community can do just what's been done here in this community. It's that leadership on the local level. And we were blessed in this Tennessee Valley Authority, the brains that came along with that. We've gone along these lines these past twenty-five or thirty years as a partnership of the people with their







MR. SHELTON: government.  
(Cont'd.)

DR. CRAWFORD: Has this increased your confidence in government?

MR. SHELTON: I'm sure that it has. I'm one of these old-type thinkers, I guess you might call it. I don't believe that the Congress of the United States is going to pass any kind of legislation that is detrimental to the American people. And how do they know whether this is good or bad legislation? They've got to hear from their people. Yes, this has increased my confidence in my government. But I tell you now I never did lack it in the first place.

DR. CRAWFORD: This was an opportunity to work together for common goals.

MR. SHELTON: That's right. Yes, sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the development of the TVA power program? When did you start getting TVA power and what effect did it have?

MR. SHELTON: I think around 1939, Dr. Crawford.







DR. CRAWFORD: Did it seem to help in your industrial development and your rural development?

MR. SHELTON: Oh, yes, there's no doubt about that. You will find that the availability of electric power is the big thing in attracting industry to your area. Now we're going to learn more about that very shortly. We're faced with difficulties in the United States this summer because of the availability of power.

DR. CRAWFORD: We are getting a power shortage, but I believe that the supply is more nearly adequate in the TVA area than almost any other.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, but even then we can run short down here.

DR. CRAWFORD: Particularly in air conditioning season.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, we can do it. I don't anticipate it. Under Mr. G. O. Wessenaer, who retired less than six months ago and was for many years the director of power for the Tennessee Valley Authority, he put into the development of power in the Tennessee valley a brain-power and direction that is nothing short of genius.







DR. CRAWFORD:           Why was the power so late in getting here?  
Was it the opposition of the private power companies in  
Alabama?

MR. SHELTON:            Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Did you follow your newspaper in the conflicts  
of the Ashwander Case and the Eighteen Power Company cases?

MR. SHELTON:            These things get out of your head unless you  
keep them in front of you in a file. The first activity  
I can remember—and again I've forgotten the years I'm  
talking about—was when Senator McKellar of Tennessee, I  
believe, was the head of the Senate Appropriations Com-  
mittee. That is one of the most powerful positions any-  
one can occupy in our government. And Senator McKellar  
never could see why the Tennessee Valley Authority didn't  
belong to him.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Well, I know he had some trouble later with  
Dave Lilienthal over an appointment.

MR. SHELTON:            Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD:           And I think over the building of the dam and  
perhaps in the Berry Marble Case where he was involved.







MR. SHELTON:           You know, I've never known the Tennessee Valley Authority to make a political appointment. This was something that Senator McKellar never understood. He thought the Tennessee Valley Authority belonged to him and that he should have the right of appointments. I mean, for instance, just suppose that TVA had ten thousand jobs. Senator McKellar could never understand with his political background why he wouldn't have a finger in appointing those folks.

DR. CRAWFORD:          Well, that got him into some controversies with TVA directors over a period of time.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, it did.

DR. CRAWFORD:          But I believe TVA did avoid this political connection in appointing people.

MR. SHELTON:           All the way through. All the way through. I think if you wanted to be sure not to get a job with the Tennessee Valley Authority you could just carry some political endorsement up there with you and you would sure be put on the shelf. And this has been wholesome. It's been good all through the years.







DR. CRAWFORD:           What change did you notice after TVA power started reaching the Decatur area? Was there a noticeable improvement over that supplied by private power?

MR. SHELTON:            You mean in use?

DR. CRAWFORD:           Yes, sir. Did you have more adequate supply of power? Were the rates better?

MR. SHELTON:            Oh, yes. The rates were better; more power being used. A good part of our area right through here is served by the Joe Wheeler Electric Co-operative to serve all these farms. Gosh, I can remember when no farm had any power. This is one of the reasons, my friend, why there ever was a Tennessee Valley Authority.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Less than one percent of the farms in Alabama, I believe, did have power.

MR. SHELTON:            I'm sure of it. I'm sure of it. Could you imagine living that way today?

DR. CRAWFORD:           Were the power companies very effective in opposing TVA? Did they have much political support, do you think, sir?







MR. SHELTON: Yes, they were strong. Again we'll go back to what we said earlier, our people needed jobs, opportunities to make a decent living. It was not a matter of saving a dollar or two on a power bill. It really wasn't that, but job opportunities. And in those years, all through those years, community leadership up and down these fifteen counties of north Alabama had worked with the industrial development departments of the private power companies. At that time we had no means for going out and trying to develop industry on our own. Today, of course, we have one industrial development concern serving these fifteen counties. Where does this money come from to support that—to support such an effort as that? Well, it comes from the electric departments of the municipal operations and the co-operative operations. Actually when we left the private power people we had no means, we had no agency, no institution that was reaching out for industry and jobs that we're talking about, opportunities for our people. So we came up with this idea of one institution serving these fifteen counties. Tennessee Valley Authority was consulted about it. This was in the days when Gordon Clapp was Chairman. They sat right here in these chairs when we talked about this thing. And they went away to think about it. They must have come back two months later and told me "all right, go ahead and see what you can







MR. SHELTON:           do about the formation of an industrial  
(Cont'd.)           development agency in north Alabama supported by the  
                  municipal operations and the electric co-operatives."

Industrial development has taken place from one end of this valley to the other. It's north Alabama I'm thinking about; the other regions of the valley can certainly speak for themselves. But there has been unbelievable industrial development from Scottsboro to the Tri-cities all the way up and down this valley. And really we think that it's just at the beginning.

Now I'm not talking about having great industrial cities. I'm talking about cities that have all the other attributes of good living. I have seen (well, I won't name the city) but I'm thinking about the northeast in the United States. They're the worst looking places to me. If you go from New York to Philadelphia . . .

DR. CRAWFORD:           Or from New York through New Jersey.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes. Well, that to me is not living. This is why down here we have gone on with this planning we've been talking about all through these years, working in cooperation with the Tennessee Valley Authority and our State organizations. We're going to come out on the







MR. SHELTON: right track. I know we are.  
(Cont'd.)

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe you are because industrialization is starting here late enough to miss some of the mistakes that have already happened say between New York and Philadelphia, and because you have this planning together with that of the Tennessee Valley Authority to help you. I don't think the same mistakes will be made here. Can you tell me something about the management of TVA at the policy-making level that you have seen. I wonder particularly about Gordon Clapp, because he's a person who, of course, is not included in this project. We have quite a number of directors still living: A. R. Jones, Brooks Hays, Herbert Vogel, Dave Lilienthal, and Arthur Morgan.

MR. SHELTON: Where is Brooks Hays now?

DR. CRAWFORD: He is living in Washington but according to a letter from him the other day, he's spending this summer at Winston-Salem where he is associated with the Ecumenical Institute at the school there. But Gordon Clapp, of course, we've not gotten to. What do you remember about him? What views did you get of his ability as administrator?







MR. SHELTON: Well, he was a tremendous fellow. He was as much like Dave Lilienthal as Dave Lilienthal, I think, would be as good a way as I can describe him.

DR. CRAWFORD: What made him such a capable leader? What qualities did he have?

MR. SHELTON: Thoughtfulness. Ability to, I would say, invent and accept change in thinking. Keeping abreast. Innovation.

You see, the Tennessee Valley Authority all along has been dedicated to the purpose of staying ahead of the rest of the country.

DR. CRAWFORD: It started that way and it also started with three geniuses, or at least three very remarkable people, in the first directors; the two Morgans and Dave Lilienthal. What association did you have with Harcourt Morgan? Of course, we can't include him in this study.

MR. SHELTON: Not a great deal. Not very much with Dr. Harcourt Morgan, not with Dr. Arthur Morgan. See, Dr. Arthur Morgan was with the Authority only a very short time. Dr. Harcourt Morgan was with it longer. I think his interests were largely directed toward the agricul-







MR. SHELTON: tural development of the valley; whereas Dave (Cont'd.)

Lilienthal was working along the lines of power availability, and so that meant industrial development. And so you see they were a pretty good team. I'm talking about economics now. I'm talking about agriculture, industry, and power supply, low cost power, navigation, flood control, all these things which go into what we call the Tennessee Valley Authority.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think they covered all aspects of it pretty well.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, they have.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you think of Dave Lilienthal's abilities? I know you became acquainted with him early and you retained that acquaintance. I know he often stopped by here on his way to the Tri-cities to talk with you.

MR. SHELTON: Yes. I guess you might say that Dave Lilienthal and I were two young men bent on a mission of helping our people to help themselves. I don't know how else I could state it. Again I think of the inspirational qualities of that leadership. We have it in "Red" Wagner, right now.







DR. CRAWFORD: Well, he's been there through the whole period, you know.

MR. SHELTON: "Red" has been there since the thing started. I knew him when he was head of navigation.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then he moved up into administration.

MR. SHELTON: Yes. So thank goodness we've been blessed with fine leadership at the head of the TVA.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you notice any particular changes in the purpose of TVA? Did World War II alter the direction of it any?

MR. SHELTON: I don't think it did other than as we said earlier. TVA not only stays abreast of change but it is innovative to the point that it brings about change, if I'm expressing myself correctly there.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe you are correct. I do understand and I know they are doing that now in their pollution control studies, at Harriman, their educational development plan in the Sequatchie Valley, and their training plan for north Alabama. Could you tell me something about this training plan that is underway now?







MR. SHELTON:           You're talking about manpower training. I don't know a whole lot about it. I just know that it's underway. It's in a pilot stage.

                          You know there were really several agencies of the federal government within the past that were charged with the responsibility of training men and women, black and white, all of this nation. And these works were largely experimental—had to be. How else are you going to solve the great problems of our nation unless you are willing to experiment.

DR. CRAWFORD:           TVA has certainly done that.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, it has.

DR. CRAWFORD:           And I know that you have in this Decatur area, also.

MR. SHELTON:           You know, this is off the subject to an extent although we are both talking about the development of our nation for all people and for all races, that's what we're talking about. And so I do say that there have been some experiments that didn't turn out.

DR. CRAWFORD:           But it's only a certain percentage. When







DR. CRAWFORD:           you do experiment you come out ahead.  
(Cont'd.)

MR. SHELTON:           Why, of course. President Lyndon Johnson  
                  knew what this country needed.

DR. CRAWFORD:           He had learned under Franklin Roosevelt.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, he did. And he knew what this country  
                  needed. Now he got run out of public life by this Viet  
                  Nam war hysteria. To my way of thinking, it was an un-  
                  fortunate name, calling something The Great Society. I  
                  thought it was an unfortunate selection.

DR. CRAWFORD:           But it was patterned on the New Deal, didn't  
                  you think.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, it was. Yes, it was. And it was greatly  
                  needed. In fact, it is under way in our nation today.  
                  Now surely along such a broad road you are going to have  
                  some difficulties and failures. But your gains are going  
                  to be so much larger than your failures that you just—  
                  well, you wouldn't have any nation unless we were willing  
                  to innovate, experiment. I don't think our nation could  
                  be held together unless we're willing. And we have shown  
                  that willingness many times, many ways, in many ages.  
                  But I think that in this age we have seen more of it







MR. SHELTON:           than we have ever seen in the history of our  
(Cont'd.)  
                  country.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Perhaps because change is so drastic and so  
                  rapid now and you have to experiment to keep up with  
                  things.

                  What did you think about Franklin Roosevelt's  
                  support of TVA? Did he seem to support it with the same  
                  interest all throughout the time he was President or did  
                  he seem to lose interest?

MR. SHELTON:           No, I don't think he ever lost interest. I  
                  don't think so. Now he was burdened we recall with a  
                  tremendous war on his hands. But again had there not  
                  been a TVA we may not have had the material to win that  
                  war.

DR. CRAWFORD:           I know the part that the power here played  
                  in the war effort, not to mention Oak Ridge.

MR. SHELTON:           Yes. And all these things were bound together.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What effect do you think his being President  
                  four terms had on TVA?







MR. SHELTON:           Why I think it encouraged it a great deal.

I think it encouraged it no end.

DR. CRAWFORD:          Do you think it had anything to do with the  
survival or permanence of TVA?

MR. SHELTON:           Yes, I do. Yes, I do. I think TVA might  
well have been dismantled had we not had three full  
terms of Franklin D. Roosevelt; cause don't kid yourself  
about the strength of the private power companies. They  
are strong. They are still strong and they are powerful  
and so, my friend, had we not had the time in which to  
consolidate our purposes in this valley we may never have  
had the Tennessee Valley Authority.

DR. CRAWFORD:          Well, I remember that President Eisenhower  
in the early '50's made some speeches about disposing of  
TVA. Now why do you think that didn't happen?

MR. SHELTON:           You know, perhaps, in your profession they  
may tell you that you can't have anything to do with  
politics but I'm sitting here telling you that every day  
of your life you're involved with politics. You can't  
help it. You just can't help it. Again if I remember  
what I'm talking about and this was as you recall . . .  
you were talking about 1952.







DR. CRAWFORD:           Yes, sir. And perhaps after the election,  
I know . . .

MR. SHELTON:           Fifty-three. Fifty-four. President Eisenhower was, I thought, an honorable gentleman. I never thought he should have been President of the United States. I thought he should have stayed in the military. By that same thing I remember what I said to begin with I thought of him as an honorable gentleman but I also thought he was naive insofar as the power interests of this country were concerned, private power interests. Let me remind you of one thing: you're talking to a first class, thumbs down, all-the-time Democrat. And so I can very readily see that if you looked at the private power interest throughout this nation I have not the slightest doubt but that you would find that they were aligned in spirit and in activity with the Republican Party. And so when Mr. Eisenhower came to power I would say that they saw an opportunity and they made the most of it, but they got caught. They got caught with what they were trying to do. You know, I was amused; in this last presidential campaign, you remember—we're just talking plain politics right now—you will remember that Mr. Goldwater, I think, came to Knoxville, Tennessee, and said something about selling TVA.







DR. CRAWFORD: I believe he also spoke to the old people in Florida about getting rid of Social Security.

MR. SHELTON: Yes. Well, when Mr. Nixon in this last campaign I remember watching a television program in which the President was conducting one of these question and answer doings, one of these question and answer sessions, and Bud Wilkinson was handing him the questions. Well, the first question they asked that night came from a fellow here in Decatur, Alabama, asking President-to-be what he was going to do about the Tennessee Valley Authority. And the President put on his broadest grin and said, "Well, I'm not going to sell it." This was the first question that he asked the man. Anyway, getting back to that, I think that President Eisenhower was naive in the conduct of the private power interests of this country. I doubted that President Eisenhower knew very much about the Tennessee Valley Authority anyway. And I said in the beginning he was an honorable gentleman but he was in the wrong place. That's the way I felt about it anyway.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, TVA has a much stronger position now. It's difficult to imagine anything happening to it. What sort of political support did it have? Did your entire Alabama Delegation always support it?







MR. SHELTON: Yes. Have a cigarette. Yes. The Alabama delegation did. I'll tell you, Senator Lister Hill, Senator John Sparkman, Congressman Robert E. Jones have been towers of strength for the Tennessee Valley Authority and for the people of the TVA area.

DR. CRAWFORD: Which of those, besides Senator Hill, are still living?

MR. SHELTON: All of them. Senator Sparkman and Congressman Jones are both in the Congress at the present time and I hope they'll be there for a long time.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe Marguerite Owen, she's a Washington manager recommended that I talk with them.

MR. SHELTON: Oh, I would. Oh, yes, sir, by all means. Senator Hill is retired but he would be available to you.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. We have a meeting later.

MR. SHELTON: And, man, what he can tell you.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe he's the only surviving member of the committee which reported the TVA bill out.







MR. SHELTON: I would expect he is. He'd love it.

We gave Senator Hill a testimonial dinner up here at Athens, oh, several months ago now and the stories that he was telling about politics, the Tennessee Valley Authority. Gosh.

DR. CRAWFORD: I had hoped to talk with him tomorrow but he had to leave on a trip. I think I'll see him later this summer.

MR. SHELTON: Senator Hill?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, well, he's a great fellow. I declare it like to have killed me when he retired. I didn't blame him of course. I think Lister was 72 when he retired. But if you just think of what that man has done for the people of this country in the field of health alone.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I remember the Hill-Burton Act.

MR. SHELTON: He's a tremendous personality and I wish he was still in Congress.







DR. CRAWFORD: Did TVA have the support it needed as far as you know from the other Congressional delegations from the South?

MR. SHELTON: I think very largely yes. There are I'm sure some variations. Lord, Lister Hill, John Sparkman, or Bob Jones could tell you to the man who supported and who didn't. Western people, Southern people, I guess are very largely responsible for the creation and the life of the successful operation of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you think TVA was fortunate in that a Republican Senator, Norris, had a good deal to do with starting it?

MR. SHELTON: I suppose so. However, I think this concept went back really to President Roosevelt. I've often heard it said or seen something about it that consideration of the use, the utilization of natural resources which I guess in substance is what we are talking about came from—the first fellow I ever heard of was Governor Pinchot of Pennsylvania, and then you came along with President Theodore Roosevelt. And the next man to come along prominently in this field was President Franklin Roosevelt. Now, again I say that







MR. SHELTON: if he hadn't been there for four terms this  
(Cont'd.) might have been wiped out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you believe that a good deal of the  
development in this valley area around Decatur is attrib-  
utable to TVA?

MR. SHELTON: Yes, sir, I do. Plus local leadership; local  
understanding of the use of these tools that Dave Lilien-  
thal was talking about a long time ago.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, the two have traditionally gone hand  
in hand: TVA planning and local leadership.

MR. SHELTON: That's right. That's the answer to it where-  
ever you go in this valley.

DR. CRAWFORD: I appreciate very much these observations,  
Mr. Shelton. Do you know anything else particularly  
you'd like to get on the record at this time?

MR. SHELTON: No, sir. I want to read you just about one  
line at the end of this little talk. I think maybe this  
will do it for you.

Now you remember the date of this talk. It was 1949.







DR. CRAWFORD:           Yes, sir. It was before the U. N., wasn't it?

MR. SHELTON:           Yes.

"I would like to close with this summary. Senator William Knowland of California who came to the Tennessee Valley to see for himself what had been accomplished since the creation of TVA returned to tell Congress that TVA was the greatest boon to private enterprise he ever saw. Or in the words of Dr. Sen, a visitor in Decatur from the embassy of India, who viewed TVA as an improvement in an ever improving democracy, or in my own way of answering visitors who come into our section of the valley and ask—'Wouldn't this all have happened without TVA?' And my answer to one and all is—'It didn't.'"

And that's the story of the Tennessee Valley Authority working in co-operation and in partnership with the people of this valley. You know, we don't own the TVA. TVA belongs to the people of the United States and it's one of the greatest lessons ever taught in the conservation of natural resources and the utilization of natural resources and human resources.







DR. CRAWFORD:           Thank you very much, Mr. Shelton.



Mississippi Valley Collection  
John Willard Brister Library  
Memphis State University  
Memphis, TN 38152



















HECKMAN  
BINDERY INC.



AUG 88



N. MANCHESTER,  
INDIANA 46962



